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## Reversal on tuition help the right course to take

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Kudos to U.S. Rep. Joe Wilson and other members of Congress who persuaded the Department of Defense to reverse its decision to halt My Career Advancement Accounts — a tuition-assistance program for military spouses.

Earlier this month, the department decided to do the only right thing — honor the commitment it made to those already participating in the program, which provides as much as \$6,000 for college to spouses of service members and reservists called to active duty. The decision in February to end the program left many military spouses in limbo — already enrolled in spring classes but unsure whether they would be able to pay for them.

Unfortunately, this modest assistance, which can be applied toward college tuition and the cost of obtaining professional licenses and certificates, will not be available to new applicants.

In February, Defense Department officials unexpectedly halted tuition payments to the 136,000 spouses enrolled in the program that started in March 2009. The department cited the expense incurred during a six-fold increase in enrollment — more than 95,000 spouses registered for tuition benefits during the first six weeks of 2010, an overwhelming number for a program that had registered no more than 10,000 a month in its early stages.

The decision angered military spouses, advocacy groups and more than 40 federal lawmakers. Wilson, whose district includes Beaufort County and its three military bases, wrote a letter to Defense Secretary Robert Gates asking that the program resume.

Leaving military spouses in the lurch is an unacceptable solution to a budgetary problem the department could have and should have anticipated in light of the recession.

We also join Wilson and Katie Savant, deputy director of government relations for the National Military Family Association, in urging the Pentagon to do whatever it can to begin accepting new applicants. Higher education brings new skills and employment opportunities to military spouses and, as a result, adds value and economic resources to the communities in which they live.

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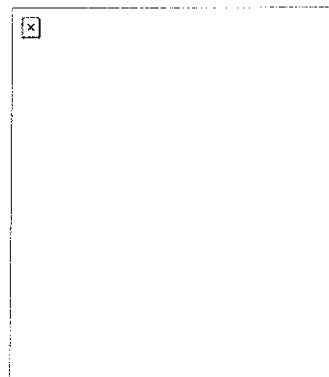
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